

From the Ohr HaChayim

by Jacob Solomon

In this week's Parsha, the Torah pledges itself that miracles will happen.

Once the Israelites are in the Promised Land, they will extend their observing the cycles of seven years to Sh'mita. No inputs into farming are permitted in that seventh year. The Torah goes further. When once every 49, seven-times-seven, years is completed, the Sh'mita restrictions get extended through Yovel for an additional, consecutive year. Lest that may seem to be inviting widespread famine and starvation, G-d assures:

I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year. It will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period. You will sow in the eighth year... but you will eat from the old crop until the ninth year... (25:20-22).

The Torah guarantees that Sh'mita observance, against the rhythm of nature, and indeed logic, will be a phenomenal and extraordinary experience. When Sh'mita occurs by itself, there will be enough food to go around for two years. When Sh'mita is followed by Yovel, there will be sufficient for three years.

The Ohr HaChayim refers the student to the story of R. Eleazar b. Birta, who was renown for his generosity

towards the less fortunate. R. Eleazar was at the market place, purchasing things to support his daughter who was about to get married and set up home. There, he ran into two people collecting for a couple who were both orphaned and badly off. Whereupon he immediately gave the money to the collectors, leaving himself a very small amount, with which he bought wheat and put in his granary. Soon afterwards, his wife went to check what he brought home, opened that storehouse and found it bursting with wheat from top to bottom (Taanit 24a).

The principle shows that G-d can go out of His way to help the people who go out of their way to fulfill His teachings. And in the case of Sh'mita, He guarantees it.

The principle of the story may be illustrated by the following, more recent incident that occurred just a few years ago. It is the practice in many shuls in Israel for members to purchase their seats for the Yamim Noraim with a standard and substantial fee that includes membership. The money covers the shul's running costs for the year. One Elul, a seat-purchaser duly paid after Shacharit, but did so in hurry as he needed to get to work on time and didn't have the time to wait for the elderly gentleman to write out a receipt. He dismissed it from mind.

Two weeks later, he got a non-pay-

ment reminder from the gabba'im. He claimed that he'd already given, but that gentleman could not recall. There was nothing in the shul's balance that appeared to indicate payment, so he had to give all over again. Bad news, and an expensive lesson in learning to handle money matters more prudently.

Very soon afterwards, the telephone rang. It was out of the blue, from a complete stranger. Would he give a few private lessons in economics?

The payment covered shul dues in full.

I happen to know the story because I am that person. 🗉